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SECRET DISCUSSION ON ARAB UNITY

Mr. Wright said that in the British view one of the reasons for Arab bitterness against Western countries was the territorial settlement after World War I. This settlement, in the Arab view, created artificial territorial divisions which have been continuously resented. There existed amongst the Arabs a deep-seated desire for some sort of union and this desire was a potent factor in their political thinking. It had so far found expression only in the Arab League, whose record was on the whole unsuccessful. The policy of the Arab League had been one of extreme nationalism orientated against the western powers. This policy had to a large extent now been discredited. He felt that if every move towards closer union between Arab countries was blocked by Western Countries the Arabs would fall back again on the extremism which had characterised the first stage of Arab League development. There was in the Middle East countries a strong desire for some change and in Arab minds social, economic, and political reform or change were linked. However illogical it might appear to the U.K. and the U.S., any attempt to block political change in the Middle East was automatically interpreted as an attempt to block economic and social change. The U.K. attitude towards any movement for closer union in the Middle East, was based on the foregoing analysis. The U.K. was opposed to change by force but had decided that it could not oppose change brought about in a peaceful and constitutional manner. The U.K. could not share the French desire for retaining the status quo at all costs.

Mr. McGhee replied that the U.S. Government was in general agreement with this analysis. There could be no doubt that the instability of the area was increased by the existence of several small states which were not viable either politically or economically. He believed a more stable situation would exist if the states could get together in some way. The U.S. Government did not seek to maintain the status quo but in the case of the proposed Iraq-Syrian Union had not considered that the moment was ripe nor the auspices correct. It had therefore counselled caution and careful consideration. He thought that the attitudes of the U.S. Government and the U.K. were close on this point.

Mr. Wright said that the proposed union in its extreme and immediate form would undoubtedly cause serious difficulties with neighbouring Arab states. The U.K. had felt, however, that it could not come out against it. It was possible that the idea would in fact now come to nothing. He noted with interest that the states had been considering steps short of complete union.

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It was agreed that much of the instability in the area arose from a feeling of insecurity in the countries concerned. There was a general discussion on how far this insecurity could be removed from which the following points emerged:-

1. The Egyptian proposal for a general Arab collective security pact was in too elementary a stage for judgment to be passed upon it. The U.K.-U.S. attitude should for the time being be non-committal.

2. A Middle East pact on the Atlantic model was excluded by the present policy of the U.S. Government and, in any case, such a pact did not by itself meet U.K. strategic requirements. Bilateral treaties between the U.K. and Arab countries were necessary and their stabilising effect was recognised.

3. As a result of the existing Palestine situation it was necessary for U.S. Government to seek to maintain a balance of its favours between Arab states and Israel.

4. U.S. Military Assistance Programme could not be extended to Near East countries other than to Greece, Iran and Turkey with the possible later exception of S.A.

5. The approval of the U.S. and its influence on the side of the maintenance of existing U.K. Arab treaties would be of great assistance to the U.K. Government and would increase the stability of the area.

6. The United States would examine its attitude toward the extension of U.K. treaty obligations to additional Arab countries, although such an extension did not at first glance seem attractive to Foreign Office representatives. The maintenance of the U.S. air base at Dhahran was a stabilising influence.

7. A revision of Arab League activities leading to more concern with economic development should be encouraged.

8. Both U.S. and U.K. Governments are opposed to political change by force but would not obstruct change brought about in a peaceful and constitutional manner.

Approved by Mr. McGhee and Mr. Wright
November 20, 1949